

# NAVAL DOCTRINE COMMAND

Norfolk, Virginia



Let Us Lead Toward Ability to Fight!

by

By Dr. Daniel S. Appleton

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NAVAL DOCTRINE COMMAND  
Norfolk Virginia

Rear Admiral M. Bowman  
Commander

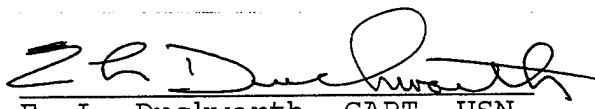
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<p>THIS TREATISE EXAMINES CONSEQUENCES OF ALTERNATIVE STYLES OF LEADERSHIP IN DESIGNING AND MANAGING NAVAL WARSHIPS: (1) LEADING TOWARD INTERMEDIATE GOALS AIMED MAINLY AT KEEPING EQUIPMENT WORKING, AS COMPARED TO (2) LEADING TOWARD ULTIMATE GOALS OF EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE DURING VIOLENT COMBAT. CONSEQUENCES OF INTERMEDIATE LEADERSHIP GOALS INCLUDE DISTORTED SHIPBOARD ORGANIZATION, INABILITY TO REMAIN AWARE OF CHANGES IN BATTLE READINESS, AND SHIPBOARD ENVIRONMENTS LACKING SENSE OF PURPOSE. MAJOR POTENTIAL REMEDIES INCLUDE DESIGNATION OF COMBAT TEAM LEADERS AS THE "REAL VIPs" ON BOARD, PROVISION OF EFFECTIVE COMBAT UNIFORMS, ELIMINATION OF CONDITIONS THAT EXACERBATE THE IMPACTS OF STRESS AND VIOLENCE, AND DESIGNATION OF DESIGNED CAPABILITIES AS THE PRIMARY BASIS FOR KEEPING TRACK OF CHANGES IN READINESS. APPENDIX SUMMARIZES PUBLISHED MATERIALS PROVIDING DETAILED DISCUSSIONS.</p>					
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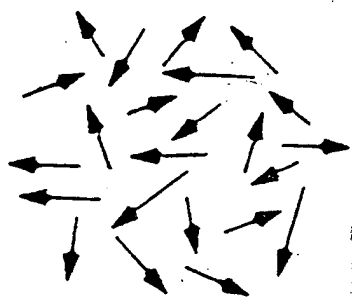
LET US LEAD TOWARD ABILITY TO FIGHT!

For the strength of the ship is the service,  
And the strength of the service, the ship.

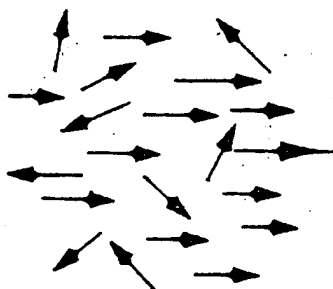
- Hopwood: *The Laws of the Navy*

By Dr. Daniel S. Appleton<sup>1</sup>

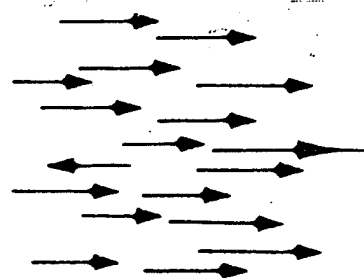
Let me explain the central words of this title. To lead will mean to get people's energies pointed in the same direction:



Poor Leading

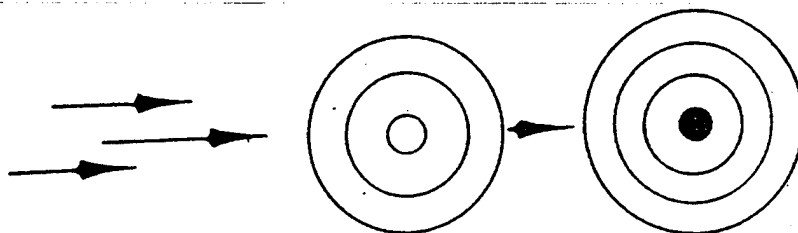


Fair Leading



Great Leading

To lead toward will imply that there exists in the minds of the leaders not only a sense of direction but a set of intermediate and ultimate targets to be achieved:



Ability to fight will mean ability to win against a powerful and determined enemy who comes at you--at sea or in port--when you least expect it, who strikes you in your weakest parts, hurts you terribly, drags out the hurting beyond your endurance, and attempts finally to destroy everything important to you.

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the U. S. Navy or the Naval Doctrine Command.

I shall take the premise from here on that achieving and maintaining expert ability to fight and win is the true and ultimate reason for the existence of the U. S. Navy. Today our Navy is pressing hard toward a substantial number of intermediate people-oriented targets: increasing compensation and benefits, improving shipboard and family quality of life, reducing drug abuse, ameliorating social conflict. Most of these are aimed in turn toward improving maintenance and operation of complex modern equipments.

All of these targets lie indisputably along the path toward ability to fight. Nevertheless they remain, all of them, no more than means to that end. When they become ends in themselves, two serious consequences can result:

- o The Navy may stop almost intentionally short of achieving the one objective that truly justifies its existence. Getting to the fight with everything working will fall far short of being able to conduct and sustain violent warfare.

- o By fostering diverse personal goals that have little to do with the organizational objectives of the Service--goals such as current job security, training for post-service careers, travel and adventure--the Navy may be failing to create the sense of common purpose that is both the mark and the strongest resource of great leadership.

We are starting to see tangible symptoms--danger signals--suggesting that both of these "serious consequences" are beginning to occur. Such signals are coming from three sources wherein vitality is indispensable to effective management and leadership within naval ships:

1. The standard shipboard organization has grown twisted and awkward;

2. The Navy's systems for "measuring readiness" are proving useless for describing changes in ability to fight;

3. The general shipboard environment for living, working, and training is steadily losing its sense of purpose.

Let me cite some specifics. Consider first the standard organization prescribed for naval ships. Every authoritative or reputable source dealing with shipboard management states somewhere that ships' companies are to be organized in Divisions and that the primary basis for assignments to Divisions should be the duties which personnel perform in battle. Beyond these written assertions, any semblance of existence of chains of responsibility or authority based on assignments to battle stations seems to be withering away. In a typical modern warship, between 35 and 50 percent of the crew will be found assigned to battle stations or high-threat watch stations not under the cognizance of officers or petty officers of their own Divisions.

According to current regulations, the principal organizational unit below the Division level is officially designated as the Work Center, which functions under a formally assigned Supervisor. The "primary unit of a ship's company for purposes of liberty, watch standing, messing, and berthing" is to be the Section with commensurate responsibilities held by each crewmember's Section Leader. No guidance seems to be offered as to how a sailor shall know his Section Leader if his ship operates in several types of Condition Watches, each with a different number of Sections, as is the case in every ship of the Navy.

On the other hand, leaders of groups which must fight together, endure violence together--such as repair parties, ammunition handlers, or ship control personnel--no longer have anything routinely to say about individual performance evaluations, special requests, or recommendations for reenlistment, unless they also happen to be Work Center Supervisors. They may even have little or no responsibility for planning or conducting team training.

As a matter of organizational fact, there is today no official shipboard entity with a generic name like "Combat Team" or "Watch Team," nor is there an official generic title, with commensurate built-in responsibilities, like "Combat Team leader." Nor, of course, does the existing standard organization describe a complete and continuing chain of primary responsibility, on and off station, for improving ability to fight. In sum, it has gradually come about that the standard primary organization of American naval ships is based upon groups of people who work together, rather than upon groups of people who will fight together.

Turn now to evaluation, an esoteric term for the process of determining whether an organization is getting better or worse at being able to do the things it is supposed to be able to do. Nothing could be more important to the Navy's capacity for determining and justifying needs for resources, analyzing the effectiveness of programs or doctrines, making strategic or tactical decisions, or controlling a ship in battle than the ability to make timely and reliable appraisals of changes in ability to fight.

The Navy's presumably Service-wide tool for describing the results of evaluations is its standard readiness reporting system, Status of Readiness and Training System (SORTS). Despite its heavy operating costs, SORTS has been declared useless by the Congress and the U. S. General Accounting Office for purposes of determining resource requirements. Furthermore, the system is not used, and may therefore be presumed useless, for any purposes of operational decision making. Since it describes "readiness" primarily in terms of levels of a few selected resources, SORTS information serves only to suggest in broad terms what a unit cannot do. It fails completely to answer, "Yes, but what can you do?"

The critical aspect of readiness evaluation that seems to have been almost totally neglected by our Navy's leadership is the need to be able to describe and communicate continuing changes in combat capabilities not just up to commanders but down to sailors. People being asked to commit themselves and their loved ones to "improving combat effectiveness" deserve sensible descriptions of what they are being asked to become good at. And they deserve continuing information describing what progress they have achieved. Goals to shoot for and feedback on results are indispensable to motivation and steady improvement. Without them, skilled people will continue to be motivated more to leave than to achieve, and combat training will continue to be more convulsive--which it is--than progressive--which it could be. Yet U. S. naval ships today, despite their technical sophistication, still lack any effective language for describing, any reliable technique for measuring, or any useful equipment for displaying, continuing changes in ability to fight.

Let me turn now to a number of aspects of environment that critically affect the sense of purpose of the people in our surface warships. Start with recognition that a warship cannot be run indefinitely as if it were in a never-ending high-threat set of circumstances. We saw in the attack on Pearl Harbor that prolonged condition watches can be self-defeating. And it is

almost a truism that many programs aimed at making life more comfortable aboard ship can be inherently detrimental to combat effectiveness.

American seamen will usually endure hardships cheerfully, indeed pridefully, if they understand why. On the other hand, American seamen can also be expected to react adversely, even contemptuously, toward measures which seem either without purpose or, worse, counter to the ostensible reasons for the demands placed upon them.

Let's assume that I am a junior officer or mid-rank petty officer assigned to an amphibious assault ship. I have a young wife and two small children. My ship has been in its home port eight days in the last two months, and we are scheduled for a seven-month deployment a few weeks from now. I can do what's being asked of me willingly and well. But I'm not sure if I--that is, we--will decide to stick with it very much longer. For one thing, there are too many things going on, many involving heavy personal demands, that don't seem to make sense. I go to my superiors to get some answers, and I come away with more questions.

With a small family's many problems and emotional needs, it's not easy to spend nights aboard ship in port. But I sometimes wonder what an in-port duty section is really supposed to be able to do. If quick response, precise action, and teamwork are so important in an emergency--in these times, perhaps some sort of terrorist attack--why are so many people kept aboard without explicit assignments? And when they change practically every day, who's supposed to train them?

Soon we shall deploy to the Western Pacific or the Indian Ocean for what looks from here like an eternity. What for? Will the Navy help me explain to my shipmates and my family how this deployment will help our country, who the "enemy" might be, exactly what we need to be ready for? I recall that, even when this Nation went to war in Vietnam, there seemed to be few explanations of why we were there. I also hear a lot about hard-to-stop missiles that can be fired from submerged submarines and home in on stationary (like amphibious) ships from 250 miles away.

But questions like the foregoing don't bother me as much as some deeper questions about things the Navy does, or doesn't do, that seem actually to reduce our ability to fight. For example:



Why don't our people have clothing systematically designed to protect them against flashburns and head injuries in battle? Every station in my ship seems to have a different idea about "battle dress," and every version looks ridiculous. Aren't we supposed to be "warriors"?

Why did our refresher training come in two separate parts, one for ship defense, another for assault operations? Don't we need to learn what to do if the ship is attacked and hit during the assault?

How in the world will we operate aircraft from our flight deck if we receive a chemical attack? Or even decontaminate the aircraft afterwards?

Somebody told me the crew's foam mattresses would give off toxic fumes if they started to burn. This I find incredible. Is it true?

Why hasn't anyone ever designed decently protected stations for visual lookouts?

What will we do if one of our nuclear powered ships is hit by a wake-following torpedo and starts to leak radiation like a floating Three Mile Island?

The paperwork load is awful now. What will it be like a week after the war starts?

And so on.

The trouble is, probably, that there aren't enough people in the business of designing ships who know, or think, very much about the violence of combat.

The three types of conditions discussed above--having to do with organization, evaluation, and "purposefulness"--have a couple of important attributes in common: they reflect a growing obsolescence of shipboard management systems that is becoming seriously detrimental to combat effectiveness, and their improvement has become a far greater task than can be solved simply by greater "command attention" on the part of commanders afloat. Corrective actions, if there are to be any, will have to come from the top leadership of the Navy. And that may be part of the problem. For there exists today no staff agency with overall responsibility for strengthening management systems in naval ships with a view toward optimizing performance under

conditions of severe stress and/or extreme violence, meaning combat.

Let me now address what can be done.

To upgrade the standard organization:

It will be enormously important not to continue unquestioning acceptance of the premise that shipboard chains of responsibility are in fact today, or should be, as they were fifty years ago: for instance, that the term Division Officer really connotes responsibility for training battle station or watch station operators, or that "Section Leader" denotes a person to whom a sailor should always look first for personal guidance.

Over these years, many responsibilities have been modified, shared, increased, or decreased. New technical ratings and specialty classifications have been created, along with new departmental technical assistants and subdivisonal work units. Hundreds of collateral duties have been added at both officer and senior enlisted levels, seemingly without thought about reasonable limits. Administrative loads have increased by orders of magnitude. There have been drastic changes simply in human expectations. The point has been reached where most ships tend to use three fairly distinct chains of responsibility: one for personal affairs and welfare, a second for administration and maintenance, a third for operations and combat training. The organizational question which has become most critical to the building of ability to fight is now, "What responsibilities should be borne by personnel assigned as on-station combat leaders when they and their people are off station?"

There are two extraordinarily powerful sets of concepts which can be brought to bear upon problems of shipboard organization:

1. The concepts of teams, teamwork, and team-building.  
This focus has two special strengths: the power of teamwork to compensate for turnover, and the power of team cohesiveness to offset fear in battle.
2. The concept of sense of responsibility, whereby  
operational personnel may be properly charged with monitoring material conditions and the fitness of personnel for battle regardless of their formal command authority.

The very first action the Navy should take toward strengthening the ability of modern warships to fight is to formally designate shipboard Combat Teams and Watch Teams as distinct elements of the standard organization, making sure that every person in every ship is assigned to a specific team. At the same time, formally designate Combat Team and Watch Team leaders and allocate to them carefully selected responsibilities, or shares of responsibility, for the fitness and training of their team members, for the readiness of their material, and for the training of personnel who man their stations on watch. In short, give combat leaders finite responsibilities for leadership.

To modernize techniques for evaluation of combat capabilities:

The greatest potential value of a practical system for measuring changes in ability to fight will lie in that system's power to help leaders strengthen motivation and make combat training steadily progressive.

Nearly thirty years ago, the Navy instituted the concept of "Required Operational Capabilities" (ROCs), which it thereafter tried to inject into functions like readiness reporting and computation of personnel allowances. The concept of establishing stable and referable bodies of "required" or designed capabilities<sup>2</sup> for organizational units has impressive potential value. Specifically, it can provide a much needed vehicle for selecting immediate goals, keeping track of qualifications, spot-checking claimed achievements, making plans for longer range training, and taking advantage of unexpected opportunities.

If spot-checking could be based on samples randomly selected from stable universes of "designed capabilities," two additional advantages might be brought within reach: (1) requirements for operational exercises and formal inspections might be substantially reduced, and (2) it could become possible to continuously compute the reliability (consistency over time) and validity (conformance with respected standards) of all formal evaluations. It might thus become feasible to set aside pointless arguments over "subjective" versus "objective" opinions and to depend primarily on the professional judgment of commanders afloat, rather than on measured quantities of a few selected resources, as the central basis for appraising the readiness of the fleet. Battle efficiency competitions could be

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<sup>2</sup> Soon to become known as "Service Core Competencies."

both reduced in scope and improved in credibility by basing them entirely on a few periodic operational readiness evaluations of capabilities selected at random on each occasion.

The greatest practical problem to be overcome in establishing "stable and referable bodies of designed capabilities" has been said to reside in the work of collecting and documenting existing performance criteria. Yet insofar as this task has become difficult so much the greater is its importance. Much of this work has in effect already been done by training commands and fleet assistance teams, and much of the rest could be done by specially designated task teams in order to minimize administrative burdens upon ships. In any warship, the task of documenting designed capabilities can be accomplished in one day.

By no means will such efforts be wasted when "objective criteria" simply cannot be found. What is needed is firm identification of exactly what capabilities are to be judged, together with standard scales for expressing and comparing professional appraisals.

Assuming that combat teams shall have been established as formal entities within the standard organizations of ships, the following actions would begin to realize the benefits of advanced techniques for evaluating combat capabilities, most especially the benefit of making evaluations of fighting abilities visible to sailors:

1. Identify the designed capabilities (DESCAPS) of every shipboard Combat and Watch Team, which is to say those functions which each commanding officer would expect each of his teams to be able to perform expertly if fully manned, properly equipped, and fully trained (in effect, a team-level "Personnel Qualification Standards" (PQS) system).

2. Decide upon a Navywide standard grading scale to express the results of every evaluative exercise, inspection, or command appraisal in terms of existing levels of capabilities. Get rid of adjectives like "good" and "satisfactory," which have nothing to do with victory in battle.

3. Design and install simple visual displays to assist in keeping the complete shipboard chain of command--starting with sailors on Combat Teams--informed of current team training goals and qualifications.

4. Begin to develop and test standard sampling procedures, including procedures for computing reliability and validity.

And observe that finally, marvelous to behold, it would become possible to tie personal responsibilities, praise, and rewards to improvements in ability to fight.

To make the shipboard environment purposive:

I shall say that a "purposive environment," one in which "purpose" identifies with ability to fight, implies a climate in which the naval seaman understands what ability to fight means, senses instinctively why it is important, takes pride when it improves, feels concern when it diminishes, and has confidence that all hands will perform effectively even under conditions of extreme violence. This would be an environment in which the sailor feels like a warrior, first and foremost.

Some of the actions the Navy can take to lend this kind of strength to the shipboard environment are the following: First, in the fleet schools and in the ships, explain the threats to the American way of life, and in this context, the Navy's missions. Describe precisely the nature of potential enemy objectives and capabilities in every area where each of our units is operating. Include areas which used to be called "rear" or "home" but which today may be well within reach of modern weapons, especially in littoral environments where every ship is a potential "combatant." Emphasize that the Navy's missions extend beyond simply protection of the sea-lanes. And keep in mind that failure to explain the consequences of a potential enemy victory was probably American leadership's most horrendous failure in the instance of the Vietnam war.

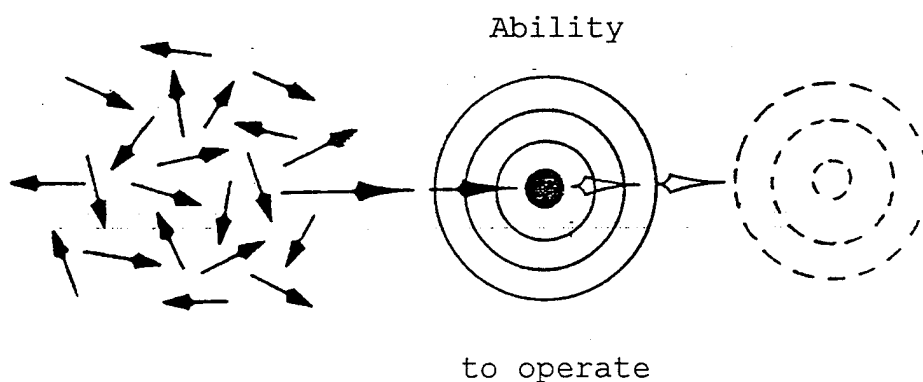
Second, teach the meaning of ability to fight. Naval seamen need to be able to comprehend in advance, as best they can, the massive human stresses that can accompany the imminence and onslaught of shipboard combat, including the effects on minds and bodies of fear, fatigue, isolation, and suspense, and of violence entailing overwhelming noise, shock, rending of structure, burning, suffocating, and dismemberment. Under such conditions, the warship is at the same time very tough but very vulnerable, the latter because its makeup includes hundreds of Achilles heels, each highly sensitive to human frailties.

Third, design and provide a fully adequate set of shipboard combat uniforms to be worn under high-threat conditions when decided by each Commanding Officer. The Navy could hardly conceive a single action that is more urgently needed, and which would be at the same time more inspirational, than this.

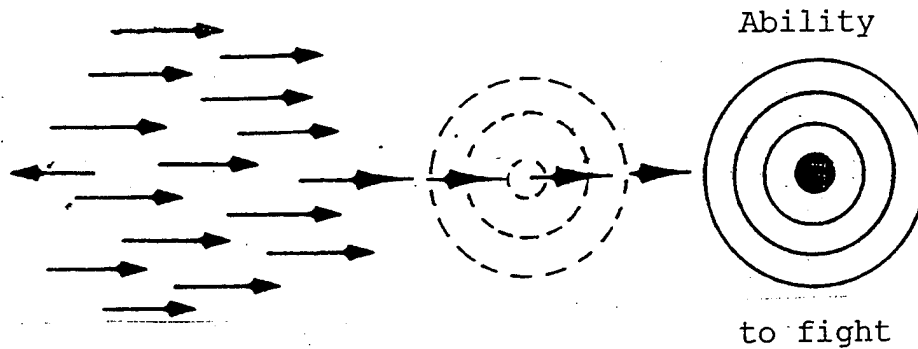
Fourth, inject purpose into customary daily routines. For example, periodically hold Captain's personnel inspections of combat teams in combat uniforms. Let combat team leaders attend formal hull and material inspections. Transit into and out of port in high conditions of readiness as special opportunities for battle drills. Assemble and instruct the day's in-port emergency teams for investigating and controlling damage, communications, internal and perimeter security, power generation, and overall control, before the end of regular working hours. In every possible way (such as publication of rosters listing primary duties), let the ship's combat control officers and team leaders know that they are the real VIPs on board.

Fifth, explain, as thoughtfully and thoroughly as possible, events and procedures that seem inconsistent with combat effectiveness.

The bottom lines of this discussion are the following: setting the Navy's main target short of ability to fight runs two grave risks: the risk of aiming people's energies in diverse directions, and the risk of falling short of the Service's principal reason for existence:



Setting the main target as ability to fight offers dramatic possibilities for creating a unified sense of purpose among Navy people and for achieving the true goals of the Service:



But there is reason for concern. Our Navy has been leading toward ability to operate, not ability to fight, for nearly fifty years. It may be that shifting the main target now will appear too difficult to try. If the Service is that far from being able to orient its leadership toward ability to fight, think about what that implies in terms of America's ability to deal with violence on or across the seas.

## Appendix

The following materials, generally available throughout the U.S. Naval establishment, provide discussions related to topics addressed by "Let Us Lead Toward Ability to Fight."

Appleton, D. S. 1983. "Shipboard Training: The Team's the Thing." U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (October, pp. 107-113). Four concerns led to an experimental training program: (1) increasing threat due extended ranges of modern weapons; (2) increasing technical complexity tends to develop Achilles heels due to human frailties and/or errors under high stress or violence; (3) believed ship's company good operators, but not necessarily good fighters; (4) considered most pressing peacetime mission was to improve ability to fight. Four tasks to developmental program: (1) how to set team goals; (2) how to measure results achieved; (3) how to provide feedback to team members; (4) how to strengthen team cohesiveness. Used only two grades: Ready or Not Ready to Fight. Documented designed capabilities for a prototype Repair Party. Assessed results in terms of Operational Readiness Evaluations. Called program "Team Qualification System (TQS)." (See also: comments expressing strong support Jan 84 p. 26; extensive comments summarizing responses and requests for materials from shipboard personnel published Jun 84 p.24; and comments Nov 84 p. 176 summarizing concerns expressed by ships and responses to such concerns.)

\_\_\_\_\_. 1985. "Endgame." U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (April, pp. 34-41). Expectable impacts upon US economy and quality of life if sealanes interrupted in time of peace. Importance of ability to defend ships in port at home or abroad, of doctrine regarding all Navy ships as warships in context of littoral warfare, of equipping ships to train themselves to fight, of teaching people meaning of expert ability to fight (meaning ability to perform designed functions under conditions of severe stress, extreme violence, and/or attempted enemy surprise). (See also comments Oct 85 p. 177 and Dec 85 p. 25 describing underlying research.)

\_\_\_\_\_. 1986. "Organizing Ships for Battle." U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (June, pp. 30-37). Description of proposed chains of authority and responsibility for shipboard battle training, to exist in conjunction with, but not to replace, existing standard organization as prescribed by the SORM. Comments by CDR W. C. Keller (Feb 87 pp.20-23) emphasize (1) ships' current lack of battle doctrines, (2) loss of sight of objective of combat readiness, (3) need for comprehensive organizational doctrine, (4) need for full evaluation of ship performance. Comments by LT J.R. Sander (Jan 84 p. 26) endorse notion of replacing Personnel Qualification Standards system (PQS) with a Team-based Qualification System (TQS).



\_\_\_\_\_. 1988. "Warship Battle Training (Part I)." U. S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (June, pp. 97-101). Conceptual definitions: Ability to fight, battle environment, Combat Team, Watch Team, Battle System, Battle Control Officer, Battle Control Organization, full battle readiness. List of current procedural shortcomings related to battle training. Checklist of 54 factors affecting a warship's ability to fight. How to organize for battle training. List of typical Combat Teams and of members of a typical Ship Control Combat Team assigned from six different divisions. How to simplify readiness conditions in order to strengthen cohesiveness.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1988. "Warship Battle Training (Part II)." U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (July, pp. 92-96). Conceptual definitions: Mission Skills, Disruption Skills, Battle Skills, expert ability to fight, battle drill, leading combat team. List of typical Disruption Skills. Illustration of a visual training feedback system, including a sample list of performance criteria for a typical mission skill.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1989. "America's Next Naval Battle." U. S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (July, pp. 36-41). Indispensable importance of human performance despite "fog of hardware" accompanying today's "accuracy revolution." Directions of effort toward helping Navy people win their first battle: (1) strive for expert ability to fight; (2) strengthen physical and psychological ability to cope with violence; (3) define on-board chains of command and accountability for overall battle readiness; (4) adopt techniques to communicate changes in fighting capabilities. Four examples of disastrous consequences when doctrines are absent. Twelve proposals for actions toward setting expert ability to fight as primary peacetime goal of every officer and enlisted person.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1995. "Dated Practices Endanger Ship Crews." *Navy Times* (6 November, p. 95). Five doctrinal shipboard management subsystems that currently impair efforts of Fleet leaders to assure victory in battle: (1) inadequate human protection; (2) unclear chains of responsibility for battle readiness; (3) inability to measure and communicate changes in capabilities; (4) inefficient shipboard battle training; (5) lack of focus of leadership programs on capabilities needed before and during combat. Importance of designing shipboard management as completely integrated system involving organization, standard procedures, doctrines, structure, equipment, and expected human performance. (Note: This published column refers to 53 recommendations submitted to the Secretary of the Navy regarding actions designed to strengthen human performance in U. S. Warships in battle. These recommendations are available without charge on request to author.)

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